

Approved For Release 2004/10/08 : CIA-RDP79S00427A000500040019-1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence

10 August 1961

MEMORANDUM

THE COMMUNIST THREAT IN NORTHEAST THAILAND

1. Communist gains in Laos have sharpened the Thai government's concern over the vulnerability of its northeastern provinces to Communist infiltration and subversion. These provinces, chronically depressed economically even by Thai standards, have long been a major center of anti-Bangkok political agitation. Up to the present, however, they have not provided an adequate base for an anti-government uprising.

2. There are three principal factors which make the northeastern provinces especially vulnerable to Communist infiltration: 1) Since the end of World War II there has been a large and well organized North Vietnamese refugee community (70 - 80,000) in the area which is highly susceptible to Vietnamese Communist cadre influence. Although these Vietnamese currently are being repatriated to North Vietnam, they still number between 50,000 and 60,000 and could serve as a disciplined nucleus for a Communist-inspired uprising. 2) The northeastern Thais are linguistically and culturally affiliated with the Lao and minority groups of the Mekong

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valley. They are more likely to be strongly influenced by political trends from across the Mekong than by directives from Bangkok. 3) The Bangkok government has never made adequate funds available for either relief or economic development in the northeast.

3. The sensitivity of the Thai government to the Communist threat in the northeastern provinces has been highlighted in the past three months by a series of arrests of more than 100 individuals alleged to be plotting a separatist uprising with Communist backing. The police claim that these persons had imported arms illegally, recruited and trained villagers in guerrilla warfare tactics, and had been in contact with "unwanted groups outside the country." On 31 May two alleged ringleaders were publicly executed as a warning.

4. While it is probable that many of the arrested northeasterners were innocent of active plotting, there is some evidence that a program of Communist subversion may be developing.

In addition, there has been an increase recently in Communist leaflets distributed in the northeast.

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